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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: MAKHMOUR REFUGEE CAMP: GOT BEGINS THINKING ABOUT  
CLOSURE

REF: BAGHDAD 1339

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady for reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: GOT officials are again considering how they might move forward with closure of Makhmour Refugee Camp in northern Iraq after a two year period during which discussion of the topic has been moribund. As the political situation in Turkey has evolved and provided politicians more space to address the country's long-standing Kurdish issue, so too has GOT officials' thinking on whether they can again look at accepting for resettlement thousands of PKK sympathizers from among Makhmour residents. Turkey's National Security Council directed the Minister of Interior to lead an interagency assessment of the needs and expectations of potential returnees and what the GOT would have to do to resettle them.

However, the ability of Turkish officials to move forward on the Makhmour issue will continue to be linked to a degree to the GOI/KRG's ability to further limit the freedom of movement and operations enjoyed by the PKK in northern Iraq. While the GOT will resist exclusive focus on Makhmour in the IZ-TU-US trilateral process, it is willing to engage more substantively on the issue during forthcoming meetings and hopes to hear the US officials' assessment of the camp based on their recent visit there. The GOT continues to believe PKK fighters freely come and go from Makhmour, contrary to claims of Iraqi officials. END SUMMARY

12. (C) Following two years in which GOT officials have been reticent to discuss closure of Makhmour Refugee Camp, the politics surrounding Turkey's Kurdish issue has begun to change sufficiently to allow at least an internal dialogue to commence on Makhmour. MFA DDG for Security Affairs Inan Ozyildiz told us June 9 that GOT officials from a number of different ministries have begun to discuss Makhmour in recent interagency meetings organized by the Minister of Interior, upon instruction by the National Security Council. These meetings have been focused principally on assessing the potential needs of those Makhmour residents who may choose to return to Turkey, including the state of the homes in which they resided prior to departing, financial assistance, educational needs, etc.

13. (C) Ozyildiz stressed that the GOT continues to see closure of Makhmour in the broader context of bringing to an end the PKK terrorist organization, and especially its presence in northern Iraq, as well as Turkey's Kurdish issue. Continued Turkish military pressure on PKK militants in northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey, forward-looking, magnanimous statements by senior GOT officials about the need to address concerns of Turkey's Kurdish minority, including by President Gul and PM Erdogan, and statements calling for an end to violence by pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) leaders like Ahmet Turk have all contributed to the ability of politicians to discuss the issue more publicly in recent months. Ozyildiz noted that while there has not been

a specific breakthrough yet, either with regard to Makhmour or handling the broader PKK issue, GOT officials are hoping that if the political situation remains favorable and "conditions are good," the GOT may look in the coming months to initiate the closure process of Makhmour that it abandoned in 2007.

14. (C) While "conditions" being good is somewhat vague, Ozyildiz reiterated well-known GOT expectations that will allow the Turks to push this process forward, most significantly the KRG taking concrete steps to constrain the movement of PKK terrorists in northern Iraq. He noted the GOT continues to believe actual PKK fighters can access Makhmour camp on a regular basis and come and go fairly easily, contrary to the claim made by the Mayor of Makhmour (reftel). Were the KRG to take clear steps to hinder logistical support from reaching PKK encampments, interdict PKKers upon arrival at airports in the Kurdish administered region, and otherwise make it much more difficult for the PKK to travel freely in northern Iraq, Ozyildiz said the GOT would be more apt to take at face value the claims that Iraqi Kurdish police are really able to control access to Makhmour.

15. (C) Ozyildiz indicated the GOT will continue to press the GOI and KRG to do more to counter the PKK presence. The GOT has been disappointed at the lack of action by the Iraqis. Noting Iraqi Minister Wa'eli has raised the issue of Makhmour closure at the last two IZ-TU-US trilateral meetings, Ozyildiz warned the Turks do not want to see the trilateral process focus only on Makhmour at the expense of tackling the more difficult problem of PKK mobility. He did indicate, however, the GOT's willingness to engage in dialogue on

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Makhmour in the trilateral context and hopes to have more substantive discussions on the issue at the next meetings at both subcommittee and ministerial levels. Responding to our comment that MNFI Deputy CG LTG Brown and Embassy Baghdad Senior Refugee Coordinator Richard Albright had recently visited Makhmour to get a better sense of the camp, Ozyildiz indicated the Turks would very much appreciate the USG's assessment of Makhmour and the security situation there. He specifically asked whether Embassy Baghdad could provide a report of the visit and also indicated that it would be useful for the US side to present its views on the issue during the forthcoming trilateral meetings. Ozyildiz said the GOT is willing to send a low-key delegation to Makhmour to assess the situation for themselves and perhaps conduct their own survey of camp residents about their intentions and expectations, but will have to plan the visit carefully at the invitation of and in coordination with GOI and KRG officials. He did not dismiss the possibility that the assessment visit could happen before the next trilateral ministerial (tentatively planned to take place July 15 in Ankara) but said it was unlikely.

16. (C) Just prior to meeting with us, Ozyildiz had met with UNHCR country representative Michel Gaude regarding Makhmour. During that meeting, Gaude said UNHCR estimates at least 600 families (approximately 3000 individuals) are willing to return to Turkey from Makhmour. Ozyildiz asked UNHCR to further assess the needs and expectations of those families to make return a reality, with the information gleaned from that assessment feeding into the GOT's own exercise on the issue.

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